

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 OMB-01 CIAE-00

COME-00 EB-11 INR-10 LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01

DODE-00 PA-04 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-03 AID-20 DOTE-00

PM-07 NSC-07 SS-20 TRSE-00 DRC-01 /164 W

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P R 141520Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1451

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 6414

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - P A R A G R A P H 5.

LONDON PASS TO AMB MOYNIHAN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, IN

SUBJECT: NATIONAL RAILWAY STRIKE

REF: NEW DELHI 6291 (NOTAL)

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE SECOND WEEK OF NATIONAL RAIL STRIKE

BEGINS WITH GOVERNMENT APPARENTLY DETERMINED TO CONTINUE

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TO TAKE HARSH MEASURES TO BREAK STRIKE IF LARGE-SCALE

RETURN TO WORK NOT ACHIEVED BY SETTLEMENT SOON. GOI OFFICIALS NOW STATE THAT MAINTENANCE OF SUPPLIES OF ESSENTIALS BETTER THAN ANTICIPATED, BUT IF STRIKE CONTINUES AT PRESENT LEVEL, CRITICAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS COULD DEVELOP IN NEXT WEEK OR TEN DAY. END SUMMARY

1. AS RAIL STRIKE ENTERS SECOND WEEK GOI, AND MRS. GANDHI PERSONALLY, APPEAR DETERMINED TO MAKE NO SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC CONCESSIONS AND TO CONTINUE FULL-SCALE EFFORT TO BREAK STRIKE IF NO LARGE-SCALE RETURN TO WORK CAN BE OBTAINED BY OTHER MEANS. ACCORDING TO TOP-LEVEL GOVERNMENT SOURCES, WHILE SUPPLIES ON HAND OF ESSENTIALS, E.G., COAL AND FOOD, ARE BETTER THAN EXPECTED, AND SABOTAGE AND VIOLENCE BY STRIKERS LESS THAN ANTICIPATED, THE IMPROVEMENT IN RAIL OPERATIONS NOT SUFFICIENT TO PRECLUDE CRITICAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS IF STRIKE CONTINUES AT PRESENT LEVEL FOR ANOTHER WEEK TO TEN DAYS.

2. CURRENTLY, RAILWAYS NOT OPERATIVE AS NATIONAL SYSTEM. GOI STRATEGY OF BUILDING STOCKS (E.G., COAL AND FOOD) IN ANTICIPATION OF STRIKE, AND GIVING PRIORITY TO DELIVERIES OF COAL, FOOD, PETROL HAS WORKED IN SOME MEASURE, BUT PASSENGER SERVICES IN MAJOR URBAN CENTERS (BOMBAY, CALCUTTA, DELHI, MADRAS) REMAIN LARGELY CRIPPLED.

ALTHOUGH COMMERCIAL AND BANKING ACTIVITIES HAVE SUFFERED, THUS FAR NO SERIOUS PRODUCTION CUTBACKS RELATED TO STRIKE SEEM TO HAVE OCCURRED.

3. MAJFVWCONCERN OF GOVERNMENT, ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT AND CONGRESS PARTY SOURCES, IS NEED TO DEVELOP PUBLIC SUPPORT (WHICH STRIKERS DO NOT ENJOY EITHER). MOREOVER, GOI OFFICIALS FEAR RAIL STRIKE VIOLENCE MAY MERGE WITH OTHER CIVIT DISTURBANCES, E.G., OVER POLITICAL AND COMMUNAL ISSUES. TO BRING ABOUT EARLY RETURN TO WORK, GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN HARSH POLICE MEASURES AGAINST STRIKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES (ARRESTS NOW REPORTED IN PRESS AT POSSIBLY 15,000), MOUNTED LARGE-SCALE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AND MOBILIZED CONGRESS PARTY CADRES AT ALL LEVELS TO WHIP UP POPULAR SUPPORT FOR USE AGAINST STRIKERS, AND TO REDUCE MASS ABSENTEEISM
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OF NON-STRIKERS. ULTIMATE GOVERNMENT HOPE, WE UNDERSTAND, IS THAT IF STRIKE CONTINUES, POPULAR FEELING OVER PRICE RISES, SHORTAGES, AND LAYOFFS WILL TURN AGAINST THE RAILWAYMEN AND FORCE THEM BACK.

4. AT THIS POINT MRS. GANDHI SEEMS TO HAVE UNQUALIFIED SUPPORT OF THE ORDINARILY CAUTIOUS MILITARY, OF THE RAILWAY MANAGEMENT, GOI BUREAUCRACY, AND CONSERVATIVE BIG BUSINESS

ELEMENTS. BUT HER TRADE UNION SUPPORT IS WEAK, AND THE CONGRESS-ALIGNED RAIL UNIONS ARE UNABLE TO KEEP MEN AT WORK. OTHER GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES' UNIONS ARE FEARFUL OF GOVERNMENT REPRISALS, AND HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO DEVELOP SIGNIFICANT CONCRETE SUPPORT FOR RAILWAYMEN.

5. CONGRESS PARTY SOURCES STATE MRS. GANDHI NOW SEES STRIKE AS PRIMARILY POLITICAL PROBLEM WHICH IS BEING USED BY THE OPPOSITION PARTIES FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES. SHE IS ALSO BITTER AT CPI ROLE DESPITE PRIVATE ASSURANCES FROM CPI LEADERS THAT THEY ARE TAKING ONLY EXPEDIENT PUBLIC POSTURE IN SUPPORTING STRIKE. OTHERS IN STRIKE LEADERSHIP (ESPECIALLY THE SOCIALISTS) SUSPECT CPI AND PARTICULARLY CPI CHAIRMAN DANGE OF DOUBLE-DEALING (FOR WHICH THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE). THEY SUSPECT THE CPI OF SEEKING TO ASSUME LEADERSHIP OF STRIKE (LEAVING SOCIALIST FERNANDES IN JAIL), COMING TO AGREEMENT WITH GOI, AND THEREBY ESTABLISHING STRONG CPI POSITION ON RAILWAYS. CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARY IS UNDER INTENSE DISCIPLINE AND EVEN CONGRESS "LEFT" MP'S WHOSE PROFESSIONAL POLITICAL POSTURE HAS BEEN TO SUPPORT LABOR HAVE CLOSED RANKS BEHIND MRS. GANDHI SEEING THIS AS A CRISIS FOR THE CONGRESS PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES GOI IS NOT LIKELY TO BE INFLUENCED BY INTERNATIONAL LABOR PRESSURES, E.G., FROM INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS FEDERATION (ITF) OR ILO.

6. ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT SOURCES, CABINET POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE IS MEETING DAILY ON STRIKE. PRESIDENT GIRI, A FORMER PROMINENT RAILWAY LEADER, IS REPORTED TO BE SEEKING SOME FORMULA TO INITIATE A DIALOGUE WHICH COULD LEAD TO A LARGE-SCALE RESUMPTION OF WORK. BUT AT THIS POINT NO ONE IN GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, OR TRADE UNION WILL VENTURE PREDICT FUTURE STRIKE SCENARIO.
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